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The Lasting Impact of Teacher Education: Tensions between Reflection, Research, and the 'Grit" of Reality

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ABSTRACT

In light of challenges to the positive contributions of teacher education programs on its graduates (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2006), this study sought to answer the question "What lasting impacts does teacher education have on graduates as they emerge into the teaching profession?" via a case study of one teacher education program in the Pacific Northwest. Graduates from the past five years were surveyed and 10% of survey respondents were interviewed. Analysis focused on participants' perceptions of their preparation for the profession as well as the extent to which they utilized and developed practices and philosophical approaches highlighted in their preservice experience.

Findings include that graduates did continue to reference particular educational theories as well as dispositions towards teaching (like reflecting to improve) as teachers; conducted research in primarily informal ways; and felt under-prepared for "the gritty realities of teaching." Suggestions for teacher education programs to maximize their positive impact and modify their curricula are included.

INTRODUCTION

The extent to which teacher education programs ultimately impact teachers is a difficult question to explore, but during difficult – even "dangerous times" for teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 3), these questions must be addressed. Darling-Hammond (2006) explains, "Productive strategies for evaluating outcomes are becoming increasingly important for the improvement, and even the survival, of teacher education" (p. 120). With an assault on schools of education, increasing state and federal certification outside university settings, and a rising regimentation of the teacher education curriculum via performance-based and pencil-and-paper tests, teacher education research must articulate and prove any presumed positive impact.

This study grew out of a rising call "that teacher educators should focus more on developing and evaluating the effects of teacher education programs" (Allington, 2005, p. 203). We sought to explore the impact of teacher education during graduates' first five years of teaching via a case study of a particular teacher education program (hereafter referred to as TEP) in the

Pacific Northwest. An analysis of the recent teacher education literature shows that while many teacher education programs study their impact on students while they are still in their university classrooms, it is much rarer that teacher educators study the long-term impact on their students when they are teaching in their own classrooms. Specifically, we sought to understand how teacher education did (or did not) prepare graduates for their induction into the profession, as well as the degree to which graduates utilized, and perhaps extended on, their preservice experiences as their careers emerged.

There are several challenges related to such impact studies of teacher education students as they begin their careers teaching, including: (a) lack of consistency (within and across teacher education programs) as to what a prospective teacher needs to know; (b) the tendency of new teachers to associate the difficulties of the teaching profession with deficiencies in their teacher education program (see Galluzo & Craig, 1990), and (c) the ever-changing nature of the local and overall teacher education and public school contexts. An additional challenge in this type of data collection is that it may be some time before teachers see (and are thus able to articulate via surveys and interviews) the value of their preservice learning experiences. For example, Featherstone (1993) illustrates how teacher education can indeed help new teachers "prepare" for difficult aspects of teaching before experience raises specific issues; however this "sleeper effect," which links earlier coursework to later classroom experience, might not activate for several years.

Nevertheless, despite these research challenges, the increasingly volatile environment in which teacher educators work makes such impact studies an imperative. Thus, we set out to answer the following questions via a case study of one school of education in the Pacific Northwest:

1. Did teacher education provide the tools needed to fulfill the requirements and challenges of getting, keeping, and growing within a position?

2. What practices and philosophical approaches did teachers take and use from teacher education in their first five years teaching? Did coursework and fieldwork prove to be usable and workable?

The Impact of Teacher Education

Reports of the problems of preparing, sustaining, and retaining teachers are numerous and well-known. Up to 50% of teachers leave the field within 5 years due to a variety of reasons, including feelings of being unprepared and unsupported in facing classroom challenges (Imig & Imig, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001), or that they never intended to sustain a long-term teaching career (Peske, Lui, Johnson, Kauffman & Kardos, 2001). Some claim (e.g., Johnson, 2005) that the gap between what K-12 educators consider important (like student discipline and classroom management) and what education professors in academia are willing to take seriously exacerbates teacher discontent. In a research-based critique of teacher education programs, Levine (2006) says that 62% of schools of education graduates feel unprepared to manage the realities of classroom life. Similarly, Johnson notes:

> While virtually all classroom teachers (97%) say that good discipline and behavior
>
> is "one of the most important pre-requisites" for a successful school, fewer than
>
> 4 in 10 education professors (37%) consider it absolutely essential to train
>
> "teachers who maintain discipline in the classroom" (Johnson, 2005, p. 2).

Yet several studies have found that specific

dimensions of teacher education programs can increase teacher job satisfaction and longevity as well as teacher performance. Hebert & Worthy's (2001) case study found that Ms. Haley, a physical education teacher, was better able to navigate the demands of schools, in part, because of the diversity of her university field experiences. Graber (1996) also studied induction success, but from the perspective of a teacher education program that "has been documented as having strong influence on the teaching beliefs and subsequent actions of program graduates" (p. 453). She reports that the program graduates' ultimate success in the classroom related to programmatic thematic cohesion, student cohorts, and courses that emphasize ongoing professional development explicitly modeled by faculty. Darling-Hammond's (2006) recent evaluation of Stanford University's Teacher Education Program found that graduates felt well-prepared for planning, organizing, and assessing their teaching, as well as teaching English language learners. However, program graduates felt relatively less prepared in special education and technology, areas in which "teacher education programs generally receive lower ratings from their graduates" (p. 134).

Other literature documents some of the challenges teacher education programs face. One dilemma is that, due to the power of prior beliefs and experiences in school settings, many teacher education students revert to traditional instructional practices once they re-enter the classroom as teachers (see Lortie, 1975; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson (2003) speak to additional challenges universities face in manifesting university ideals in graduates' teaching practices. The researchers studied the extent to which educational "concepts" – practices and theories unified under a single theme – transferred from three university programs (one elementary, two secondary English) to the workforce. The study found that although the elementary teacher education program was unified under the concept of Piagetian constructivism, several things weakened the development of the concept once the students began full-time teaching, including: different definitions of constructivism at the university and the school; inconsistency in the university program around constructivism; lack of constructivist modeling by university professors; and school-based constraints that make constructivist instructional practices difficult to implement. As for the two secondary programs, the study found they were so "structurally fragmented" that they had little impact at all on their graduates, who found their "conceptual home base" at their early-career teaching sites (p. 1423).

While results are mixed, the research suggests that teacher education programs provide support for graduates as they shift into the teaching role, but that certain disconnects may exist between teacher education and classroom settings that can hinder this transition. While the research above explores the impact of university teacher education around the idea of "concepts" of teaching, this study sought to provide a more comprehensive view of the impact of a TEP. Specifically, this study examines the manner in which teacher education experiences did/did not prepare graduates for teaching, in addition to which philosophies and approaches were ultimately most applicable to the work of teaching.

Methodology

Survey Instrument

Seeking information about and perspectives of TEP graduates from the past five years (2000-2004), the complete data set for this research consisted of a 3-part written survey and a phone interview conducted with 10% of survey respondents. The methodological choice of combining surveys and interviews supports participants in relating their perceptions of program learning experiences (see Darling-Hammond, 2006). The first part of the survey solicited demographic information about the graduate, the year of graduation, program, and his or her employment status. The second part had 14 Likert-scale questions involving a variety of potential impacts of

the teacher education program (for survey and results, see Appendix A). The third part had 6 open-ended questions, with one-half page provided per question (see Appendix B).

The open-ended narratives from the surveys were analyzed and then used to construct the phone interview protocol (see Appendix C). The interview questions were designed to elicit responses that would provide specific reasons, examples, and explanations for the emerging themes in the survey narratives. One of the researchers called the interviewees, asked permission to record the conversation, asked 5 follow-up questions, and later transcribed the recordings.

All graduates over a five-year period (2000-2004) from two elementary and one secondary TEP were contacted to participate in the study. The initial contact with the sample was through a list-serve email invitation. Several weeks later, surveys were mailed to those in the sample who had not responded to the list-serve invitation. Approximately 3 weeks later, a second copy of the survey with a different cover letter was sent. A total of 352 surveys were sent out by postal mail and email. Twenty-six were returned as undeliverable, and 135 were returned completed for a response rate of 38% of graduates in the five-year span.

Survey Analysis

Analysis of the survey was conducted in two distinct phases. A qualitative analysis of the extended response survey items (15-20) was initially conducted. All three authors read through the transcripts of the participants' responses and coded along self-defined themes relative to the research questions. Two of the authors coded by program, and one author coded responses for the total population without distinction for program. The researchers shared and saturated their individual themes into a single coding scheme for each survey item. To minimize potential for bias in the qualitative analysis, statistical analysis of the first 14 survey items was made after the initial coding of the qualitative items. Means were computed and frequency charts constructed for all three program samples as well as for the total sample population. Mean differences between program samples were explored, and mean responses less than 2 and greater than 4 were particularly noted. These numeric data were also later used to confirm or disconfirm findings from the qualitative analysis of survey items 15-20. Overall, themes were consistent and means comparable across programs; therefore, the discussion of results will relate to the population as a whole, except where specifically indicated.

We also examined the statistical data from the surveys, focusing on relationships between the key themes that emerged. Specifically, we looked at (a) the relationship between those who say they use inquiry/research (#2) and perception of preparation for the realities of teaching (#6); (b) those who say they use inquiry/research (#2) and those who say they have taken on leadership roles (#8); and (c) the relationship between those who say they were prepared for the realities of teaching (#6) and those who say they have taken on leadership roles (#8).

Follow-up Interview

The analysis of responses on the qualitative items of the survey created a thematic framework that was used to construct the five questions asked during the follow-up interviews. Issues that emerged related to professional development, the "realities of teaching," use of students' backgrounds in practice, perception of and use of theory in practice, and classroom management. 10% of respondents who had provided their phone number on the survey were randomly chosen to participate in phone interviews. Interviewees were asked if they would be willing to participate in the second phase of the research, and were also asked if they would agree to have the interview audiotaped. Every interviewee contacted agreed to participate; one person chose to participate by providing his responses to the

questions over email.

Teacher Education Program Context

While the three teacher preparation programs at the study site TEP have unique characteristics, there are important similarities they collectively share. Common goals and themes that are shared across programs include 1) exploration of learning theories, with an emphasis on constructivist philosophies, 2) being cognizant of and reaching all of the various learners in a given classroom, 3) instructional decision-making through data-based inquiry, 4) systematic reflection on practice, 5) social justice, and 6) teaching as a professional endeavor. These goals and themes are implicitly and explicitly taught through various foundational, methods, and research courses, field experiences, and other program experiences. Each program has a field experience that extends the length of an entire academic year and is significantly utilized in course assignments and discussions. The Masters in Teaching (MIT) and Secondary (SEC) programs have a research thesis requirement; the Undergraduate (UG) program does not. The programs have a collective placement rate of approximately 70% with positions typically found in large suburban and small rural districts. Respondents to the survey, however, had a somewhat higher rate of employment – with 86% teaching full-time; 11% substituting; 1% teaching part-time; 1% working in non-public school educational settings; and 1% not working in education.

Findings

The findings that follow are organized around a predominant theme – the extent to which graduates felt they were prepared for "the gritty realities of teaching." Through this lens, we examine the relationship between the grit of day-to-day teaching as described by participants and the ways in which they did/did not integrate university ideals relating to applying theory, conducting research, and engaging in reflection.

The Realities of Teaching

Graduates appeared to value and utilize certain aspects of what they learned at the TEP in the day-to-day reality of school life. However, participants overwhelmingly spoke to significant gaps between what they were instructed to do via university experiences and what they reasonably could do as teachers. What was it about K-12 teaching that was keeping TEP graduates from applying theory discussed in the TEP, conducting and utilizing research, reflecting, and inquiring in ways they had hoped at the end of their programs?

Analysis of the extended response survey items revealed that many teachers indicated they felt under-prepared for what some called "the gritty realities of teaching." These gritty realities fell into six categories – two related to classroom instruction and four outside of the immediate classroom. The four non-instructional teaching realities for which teachers felt under-prepared were: (1) Overall teacher stress; (2) Multiple non-instructional responsibilities (meetings, committees); (3) Balancing a teaching and family life; and (4) School level politics and relationships. The two instructional categories were: (1) Maintaining teaching ideals amidst state and national mandates; and (2) Classroom management. Comments from graduates articulated the nature and implication of these gritty realities, as well as suggestions on how teacher education could better prepare graduates for awareness, relevant strategies, and coping mechanisms.

I Am Not Super-Teacher

Many teachers said they wondered whether any teacher education program could prepare them for such realities as those listed above. However, others were quite explicit about ex-

actly what type of, as one teacher put it, "raw bare truths" they felt were missing from and should have been present in their teacher education curriculum. In some cases, teachers who felt they lacked the tools to manage teaching realities – such as lack of time, high levels of stress, and general frustration – were already beginning to wear down. For example, a fifth-year graduate commented that the "hours are affecting my family and health," and because of this, she was currently seeking a position outside the public education system.

However, most comments related to expected longevity were not this severe; in fact, a vast majority of the teachers surveyed said they were committed to the profession long-term. Yet, for many, along with this long-term commitment was a more immediate dissatisfaction with their preparedness for what they were currently experiencing. One specific theme that ran across the criticisms of how the TEP ill-prepared them for the realities of teaching was the university bolstering a sense of idealism without the necessary accompanying awareness of realistic constraints in order to manifest ideals. Several referred to this as the university's "model of super-teacher." While the idea that all kids could be reached with the right methods was appealing in the abstract, teachers said that once they began their careers, the notion became "depressing." One teacher commented that she felt as if it was "all her fault" if any student failed, when in reality there are multiple reasons why a student could fail. A second-year graduate explained:

> I feel that the program focused too heavily on ideals of a classroom and not enough of the real world things that teachers must deal with every day. Teachers need to bring many different styles to their teaching, not just the perfect ideals ... The program emphasized how literacy, science, math, social studies programs should look, but did not seem to account for the every day problems that keep these ideals from working smoothly. It also was lacking in helping new teachers figure out what tools they needed to achieve these ideals.

Everyday problems teachers identified as keeping them from reaching these ideals included: lack of time, resistant administrators and colleagues, an increasingly regimented curriculum, and being responsible for too many students to successfully "individualize" for all. Graduates articulated that non-instructional conditions like the stress associated with the pacing of a teacher's day and struggles with collegial relationships left 'little in the tank' for other pursuits. Instructional challenges like mandated prescriptive curricula and the demands of classroom management further reduced passions and energies. Thus, many echoed the concern that "where the program falters is in preparing people to bridge the gap between the ideals taught by the program and the gritty reality of a career in education." While some taught in environments that encouraged experimentation and growth, others taught in schools where "my colleagues looked at me like an alien when I talked about student choice" or districts which "don't embrace much of the philosophies we have learned."

The survey Likert scale data confirmed the finding that being given a glossy vision of teaching as a university teacher education student was perceived to be ultimately a disservice by the teacher. One of the lowest ratings on the survey was "The norms, customs, and perspectives at [the university TEP] are similar to the school where I teach" (2.53). Thus, the teachers indicated in multiple ways that a successful TEP needs to promote awareness of the constraints in and on schools; directly address why it is difficult to practically embody ideals; and explore strategies to help transcend some of these school-based constraints.

Theory into Practice

The naming and describing in current context various educational theories implicates the TEP as an impacting agent in the teachers' growth trajectory. Responses to the statement (survey Q#1) "I use research and scholarly literature

as a resource to support my teaching" suggest that graduates continued to see themselves as making use of theory and research in support of their practice; only 16% of the respondents disagreed that they continue to make use of these activities. Analysis of the responses to the open-ended question (#15) as to the most influential aspects of the TEP revealed that 58% of graduates claimed or provided evidence that they recall specific theoretical ideas from their teacher preparation and continue to incorporate these theories into their instructional practice. 37% exclusively referred to general theoretical approaches, 14% contextualized their theoretical ideas completely in terms of teaching content, and 8% did both. The following comment from a fourth-year graduate indicates continued use of content-based theory developed during the teacher preparation process:

> All the practices I learned in school (university teacher education) I carry with me. They are current, research-based, and work well in the classroom. Investigate math and science to introduce the lesson, students work in groups, reciprocal teaching, small guided reading group, literature circles. Most all I do is a reflection of my MIT experience at the TEP.

Many students also cited frameworks to work with "diverse" students or students with "various learning styles" as well as approaches to building a community in the classroom, attributing their theories directly to their preservice experience.

Many of the UG graduates said they appreciated being taught by adjuncts who were also practicing teachers, and that these instructors were most instrumental in facilitating theory-practice connection. A third-year graduate explained:

> Most of the instructors were currently in the trenches with students daily. The approach I like to use most is constructivism. This approach really checks a students' understanding of course material.

However, 21% of graduates claimed or provided evidence of their perception of a disconnect between theory and practice; 12% discussed this in general terms, and 9% discussed this in regard to the teaching of specific content. As a fifth-year graduate stated, "'Theory' is not always reality." Another fifth-year graduate extends this perspective:

> My education at the TEP was strongly based in constructivist theory. While that is supposed to be good, my time in the classroom has taught me that some things need to be directly taught or told. I was miserable my first two years teaching first grade because I was being constructivist, trying to guide them through learning experiences. I felt like I floundered the same way (I did) through the TEP, because I was researching, reading, and presenting – "constructing" my own learning, but I was just a good parrot. I truly didn't understand . . . Constructivism is good at times, when kids have knowledge.

Trends in the interview data could not be found within or across hiring districts in regard to retention, use, and furtherance/development of theory due to the limited number of interviews conducted. There also did not appear to be a pattern regarding the number of years since the participant had graduated and their comments regarding the development and use of theory. Seven of the 11 MIT graduates who were interviewed explicitly stated that they no longer make use of theory developed at the TEP, while all 3 of the SEC and both of the UG graduates claimed that they continue to use theory. A fifth-year graduate of the MIT program was explicit regarding her perceived lack of theory retention and application:

> I'm not very much into theory. I'm just very practical, and I think until you get in and do it, all the theory in the world is not going to help you . . . theory to me is just theory. It's like so somebody went out and researched something . . . The program did a lot with that. You know group work, and individual work, you know letting kids create versus instructed drill. I just remember sitting there in class going uhhhhhhh.

This teacher appears to have retained some general theories from her program, but did not see these as "practical" until she had the chance to apply them in her own classroom situation. The other students who did not see themselves as applying theory made similar comments. As a fifth-year graduate teaching fourth grade stated, "If it's a theory I didn't use I've forgotten it by now."

Overall, the graduates seemed to have held on to particular theories developed while a pre-service teacher that they deemed and continue to deem useful. However, in discussing their application as teachers of TEP-learned theories, there was an undercurrent that what they have been taught by "time in the classroom" negated the perceived usefulness of many of these ideals.

Reflection, Research, and Continued Growth

An enormous amount of data emerged in regard to the graduates' plans and dispositions towards inquiry, growth, and research – basic tenets of the TEP. We wondered if teachers continued to generate new knowledge and were continuing their learning through data-based inquiry, or if they had abandoned TEP philosophies and practices altogether.

Approximately 22% of the graduates did not provide evidence that they conduct classroom research. An equal number reported that they are not doing research, but went on to describe informal research or reflective practices. About 55% of the graduates described research they were conducting.

Of the respondents who said they do no research, time was often cited as the reason. "I don't. Not formally anyway. It's called finding a job and surviving," and "Not a lot at this point—I'm just surviving my 1st year," were typical responses as to why graduates were not doing research. There were a notable number of respondents who, after reporting that they did not do research, shared their intentions for future research:

> After I have settled into my current position I plan to research many areas. Some of these areas may include: "What are the effects of multi-age classrooms on student learning?" "Why do parents seek alternative education for their children?" (third-year graduate)

> Since this is my first year I am trying to keep up with everything, so the last item on my agenda is my own research. If I do have the opportunity in the future, I would do research on ESL practices. Over 80% of my students are ESL, so research in this area would be helpful to myself and others.(first-year graduate)

For the most part, respondents described research in informal methodological contexts and for general purposes. A third-year graduate said, "Teaching is research. As a teacher, you are always experimenting and reading to try to find ways to better your instruction!" This most common type of research cited – informal and reflective – usually involved observation, performance records, field notes and journaling, or eliciting feedback from students on which to reflect.

Overall, while a few graduates did conduct systematic research, the majority described integrating research more informally into everyday planning, practice and assessment – and that this type of research is all they had time for. As a first-year graduate explained, "Everyday is a research project!" Graduates made similar comments about reflection – some mentioning it as a practice, and others characterizing it as a disposition toward teaching – a disposition initiated in their TEP, as explained by a second-year graduate:

> I think the most important thing I took away from the TEP was to be a reflective and responsive teacher. I am constantly thinking about my thinking and teaching. I also share my thoughts with my students. They help direct my teaching. My teaching is responsive because everything I do is based on my students' needs.

Such ongoing but unsystematic reflection, often used to guide overall classroom instruction and pedagogical response to individual learners, typified graduates use of reflective practices, which many claimed began at the TEP.

Analysis of Descriptive Statistical Relationships

Analysis of the descriptive statistics of the relationship between inquiry/research and feeling prepared for the realities of teaching yielded no significant findings. Overall, 50% said they either "strongly agree" or "agree" that they were prepared; of those who "strongly agree" that they use inquiry/research, 37% felt prepared; of those that "agree" that they use inquiry/research, 50% felt prepared. There was little difference in feeling prepared for the realities of teaching between those who said they continued to inquire, research, and draw from research, and those who said they did not.

The relationship between inquiry/research and taking on leadership roles similarly yielded no significant findings. Overall, 61% said they either "strong agree" or "agree" that they have taken on leadership roles; of those who "strongly agree" that they use inquiry/research, 56% claim taking on leadership roles; of those who "agree" that they use inquiry/research, 73% claim taking on leadership roles. Again, there was no greater or less connection between those who inquired and researched and those who lead.

However, a more significant relationship emerged in the analysis of the relationship between perception of preparation for the realities of teaching and taking on leadership roles. While 61% of the total sample said that they had taken on leadership roles, this increased to 75% among those who "strongly agreed" that they felt prepared for the realities of teaching. Further, among the 12% of the total sample who either "disagreed" (10%) or "strongly disagreed" (2%) that they had taken on leadership positions, none also "strongly agreed" that they felt prepared for the realities of teaching.

The descriptive statistics relative to preparation for teaching realities and leadership are in line with other research (see IEL Report, 2001) which has found that lack of familiarity with the sometimes harsh conditions under which teachers work leave many new teachers 'treading water' rather than working to build their visibility as leaders in their field. Conversely, those who have a clearer sense of the scope and demands of the profession more quickly become leaders within their schools.

Conclusions

This study suggests that a program of teacher education can have a significant impact on the development of key knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for success in the profession. Further, the evidence indicates that teacher education can lay the foundation for a positive professional development growth trajectory

during the first five years of teaching. Graduates of teacher education do harken back to their student experiences as they tend to the demands and realities that face them in today's classrooms. At the same time, this study suggests that some shifts in the dispositions and curricula of teacher educators need to occur as well. These may include a greater focus on the practical constraints and demands on teachers and schools, and a deeper awareness of the stresses associated with the profession as a whole.

Because of the differences in contexts and purposes in K-12 and university classrooms, disconnects between "theory" and "practice" exist, as evidenced in this and other studies (for example, Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). The transition from teacher education student to teacher is one that TEPs can help to mediate. Although the gritty realities of teaching provide significant obstacles to this transition, the impact of teacher education can persist well past the initial induction process. Including these gritty realities of teaching more fully into teacher education may strengthen the longer-term positive impact of programs on their graduates.

Implications

Any implications from this study must be tempered due to methodological constraints. This was a case study of one TEP with a survey response rate of 38%. Further, while we mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, we did not, as Darling-Hammond (2006) suggests, use multiple additional measures like pre- and post-tests of teacher knowledge, samples of student work, and longitudinal observations of clinical practice. However, in addition to the empirical findings stated above, this study contributes to the teacher education literature by providing a potential framework through which to view the impact of TEPs. Cross-program studies are needed to further explore whether the integration of university ideals and K-12 grit stands as an important nexus of TEP effectiveness.

Suggestions for Teacher Education

Assuming that drawing from research and engaging in research, reflection, and inquiry focused on equitable and effective teaching practices are worthy endeavors, we explored the data for ways teacher education might have a more successful long-term impact. Rather than avoiding discussing the realities of teaching, the teachers overwhelmingly suggested that these realities should be in the foreground throughout any quality TEP. One first-year graduate proposed: "Teach to the real world – then show us how to make it better. Don't tell us that a better world exists. It doesn't." This "real school" world, several claimed, included such educational realities as worksheets and standardized tests, even though the university professors "preached that these should not be used to evaluate students."

These suggestions from TEP graduates echo Imig & Imig's (2006) imploring teacher educators to be "brutally honest" about the often-unjust conditions teachers face. The authors comment that "Educators that avoid addressing such questions and realities of working conditions fail to serve either the interest of their students or those who employ them in early years of practice" (p. 287).

What exactly would a course that explored the gritty realities of teaching look like? The extended interviews offered several insights. Respondents suggested such topics as: (a) How to balance a teaching and family life and "set limits"; (b) How to avoid "standardized instruction" which takes away "educator creativity and momentum"; and (c) Facilitating discussions, led by returning first-year teachers, of "all the other things outside the classroom" a teacher must deal with. Also, there were a number of suggestions on how to improve teacher education to support classroom management, including "two-way glass" methods like mock scenarios and role plays, and videos of teachers "doing things well" as well as "video footage of a teacher who is struggling with classroom management" for analysis and discussion. What the suggestions

had in common is that they embed theoretical discussions in what is actually happening in schools rather than exploring how to apply theories to classroom life.

While many teachers said they were dissatisfied with the way the TEP prepared them for the day-to-day grind of teaching, the interviewees also echoed the survey responses in emphasizing that many teaching realities (like extensive paperwork, meetings, and school politics) could never be taught in any program and must be learned on the job. Thus, even within critiques of the program's lack of realistic focus, there was also an acknowledgement that some aspects of reality could not be taught and must be experienced.

Final Words

Teacher education might not, or perhaps can not, adequately prepare preservice teachers for the full spectrum of gritty realities that define life in the profession. This study has provided specific suggestions for teacher educators for improving graduates' ability to navigate these realities in the simultaneous quest for providing effective instruction to their learners and effective professional development to themselves. An absence of explicit information about "the downsides of teaching" can push new teachers into perpetual survival mode, unable to keep up with the day-to-day, let alone take on leadership roles and create change (IEL Report, 2001). Education professors, then, must "speak to the gritty reality of 'really learning to teach'," particularly related to teaching's emotional intensity and the "the gap between schools' realities and candidates' hopes and aspirations (fed, in part, by teacher education faculty)" (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, p. 351, 356). This does not imply that expanded thinking about teaching as an act and a profession should be removed from teacher education curricula, but rather is an argument to embed concepts like teacher leadership, research, reflection and vision-building within the realities of classrooms and schools.

Finally, we are wary of critics who challenge the existence of schools of education with charges of ideological bias, low admission standards, and lack of relevance (Hartocollis, 2005). Some of these critiques (see Levine, 2006) directly relate the inadequacy of teacher education programs to their lack of preparing graduates to cope with the realities of the teaching profession.

We invite other TEPs to engage in such self-analysis, both for the betterment of programs, and to strengthen the TEP research base. It is our hope that individual studies will eventually grow into cross-program comparisons, so that we can cull together our best practices, theories, and program aspects, to ultimately better educate teachers, K-12 students, and those in the public arena.

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Appendix A – Likert Survey Questions & Responses

** Note – Numbers represent % of total repsonses

Responses to Likert Scale Questions

1 strongly agree	2 agree	3 neutral	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
1) I use research and scholarly literature as a resource to support my teaching.				
26	49	16	8	1
2) I inquire about my own teaching through my own research and use of scholarly literature.				
18	50	22	9	1
3) My current attitudes, beliefs and perspectives about teaching and learning were influenced by my professors and colleagues at the TEP.				
39	44	14	3	0
4) The norms, customs and perspectives at the TEP are similar to the school where I teach.				
11	43	28	17	1
5) My current attitudes, beliefs and perspectives about teaching and learning are similar to those in the administration at my school.				
24	46	17	13	0
6) In my first year of teaching, I was prepared for the realities of everyday teaching life.				
11	39	22	21	7
7) I consider my TEP coursework and fieldwork to be a continuing resource for classroom challenges.				
13	53	24	8	2
8) I have taken leadership positions within my school.				
25	36	27	10	2
9) I felt competent and qualified as I searched for a teaching job.				
38	41	14	5	2
*10) **Secondary teachers only**: I felt prepared to teach my content area.*				
44	37	10	7	2
*11) **Elementary teachers only**: I felt prepared to teach math.*				
30	47	16	7	0
12) I felt prepared to teach literacy.				
26	47	20	7	0
13) I felt prepared to teach science.				
20	41	27	10	2
14) I felt prepared to teach social studies.				
24	46	17	13	0

Appendix B – Open-Ended Questions

Please take the space provided, the back, and/or extra paper to answer the following questions:

15) What were the strongest aspects of your TEP? What practices or approaches learned at the TEP do you carry with you as a teacher?

16) What were the weakest aspects of your TEP? For which aspect of teaching do you feel you were least prepared by your TEP?

17) How long do you plan to stay in the field of education? What roles do you see yourself taking during that time?

18) What kind of research do you do in your classroom?

19) Has anything from teacher education proved to be unrealistic or unusable?

20) In what specific ways did the TEP position you to further your professional knowledge and capacity throughout your classroom teaching career? Please describe the nature of this growth and how your teacher education experiences positioned you for this.

Appendix C – Telephone Interview Questions

1) What did the TEP do to support your professional development?

a) What did your experiences at the TEP do to support you in generating new knowledge, insights, and professional dispositions during your career?

2) a) What are some of the realities of teaching for which the TEP program prepared and failed to prepare you?

b) What would you include in a course to prepare future teachers for the ultimate realities of actual teaching?

3) In what ways did your TEP instill a desire and ability to utilize students' backgrounds in your planning and teaching?

4) What is a specific theory you learned at the TEP that you found usable at your teaching site? Was this something you pursued on your own, or was it encouraged by your district?

a) What is a specific theory you learned at the TEP that you found unusable at your teaching site? In what ways was it unusable?

5) If you could design a classroom management course to prepare future teachers for classroom challenges, what would be in?

a) What would be the content of the course?

b) How would it be organized/taught?